

CH'AN NEWS LETTER

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Enlightenment Through Eye Consciousness

A talk on the *Surangama Sutra* given by Master Sheng-yen on Dec. 19, 1993, and edited by Linda Peer and Harry Miller.

We have been studying the section of the *Surangama Sutra* called "The Twenty-five Kinds of Perfect Penetration." Perfect Penetration is the state of thorough, ultimate enlightenment, and twenty-five methods of attaining such enlightenment are described. There are actually infinite numbers of methods of practice through which we can attain enlightenment. These twenty-five are simply used as examples.

We have already studied the section of the sutra concerning the methods of practice which employ the six sense organs. Today we will look at one of the methods which employ the six consciousnesses (of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind). In the sutra, Sariputra, the wisest of the Buddha's disciples, describes perfect penetration through "eye consciousness." The beginning of this paragraph, which I have discussed, reads:

Sariputra then rose from his seat, prostrated himself with his head at the feet of the Buddha and declared: 'In former eons, the sight-perception of my mind was already pure and clean, and in my subsequent incarnations as countless as the sands in the Ganges, I could see without hindrance through all things either on a worldly or supra-mundane plane. (One day), I met on the road the two brothers Kasyapa who were both preaching the doctrine of causality, and after listening to them my mind awakened to the Truth and thereby became extensive and boundless.

Sariputra had relied on his eye consciousness for countless eons, countless lifetimes. It was pure and sharp and he benefited from it, but still, he was not able to attain arahatship until the time of the Buddha. Different people use different methods of practice, some relying on hearing, others on sight, and others, like Sariputra, on eye consciousness. Sariputra reasoned with the eye of his mind.

What does it mean to use the eye of the mind, or eye consciousness, to reason? If I say to you that something is like a flower in the sky, or like a reflection in a mirror, you use your ears to hear my words but then you use the mind's eye, or eye consciousness, to visualize what you have heard.

Some people listen to the Dharma with their ear consciousness; some listen with their eye consciousness. It is even possible to use one's nose consciousness, as we will discuss later. How can you use eye consciousness to listen? If I say "heaven" some of you will "see" an image of what you think heaven is like, and when I say "hell" you may visualize a terrifying hell. When we associate a visual image with something we hear or think of, and that visual image does not come to us through our eyes acting as sense organs, that is "using eye consciousness." What we visualize may be something we have seen before or something purely imaginary. For instance, Bob has entertained us with magic tricks at our Buddha's birthday celebration here at the Center. When you hear the word "magic" you may visualize Bob doing magic, or you may visualize some magical occurrence.

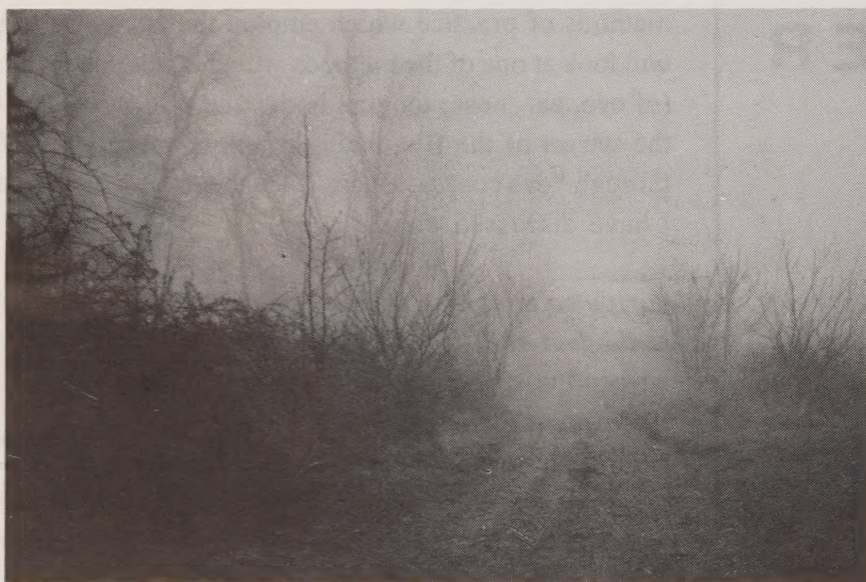
Now let us return to the text:

...My mind awakened to the Truth and thereby became extensive and boundless. I then left home to follow the Buddha and achieved perfect sight perception, thereby acquiring fearlessness, attaining arahatship and qualifying as the Buddha's Elder Son - born from the Buddha's mouth and by transmission of the Dharma. As the Buddha now asks about the best means of perfection, according to my personal experience, the best consists in realizing the most illuminat-

ing knowledge by means of the mind's radiant sight perception.

Sariputra said, "...My mind awakened to the Truth and thereby became extensive and boundless." meaning that he realized enlightenment, and his illumination was perfect.

Usually we refer to the Buddha as having three kinds of illumination; the illumination of past lives, heavenly eye illumination, and the illumination of the cessation of all outflows. But in this sentence the word "illumination" simply means the transformation of consciousness to wisdom.



Guo-rou

In Sariputra's case the transformation of eye consciousness to wisdom was perfect.

Those of you who do not come here often may not be clear about what enlightenment, or illumination,

means. Why is enlightenment important? When we have not realized enlightenment, we perceive things as if we were surrounded by darkness and clouds. Everything is unclear. This is vexation, and sometimes it is so profound that it is as if you cannot see your hand in front of your face. In China we say that when your mind is like that, you don't know your own father and mother, nor can you recognize your children.

On the other hand, when the mind is enlightened, perception is as unimpeded as vision on a clear, sunny day. Confusion and vexation are absent and there is no disturbance from the environ-

ment. Perception is completely unobstructed.

Returning to the sutra, Sariputra said, "I...achieved perfect sight perception thereby acquiring fearlessness..." Why is it that a person who has attained deep enlightenment and has no vexations is fearless? When we have no vexations we are free of worries. We do not grasp or reject, so there is nothing to fear.

It is not that someone who is enlightened has no fear because of arrogance. Rather, he or she sees things as they are and accepts them. Being fearful rarely helps us. If this building collapsed or if someone on the street pointed a gun at you, would you be afraid?

Just a week ago someone shot several commuters at random on a Long Island train. If you had been on that train, would you have been afraid? (People in the audience say yes.) Obviously, one would be afraid in such a situation. But what good does it do? If

you are shot, you will be injured or die whether you are afraid or not. Eventually three people who were not too afraid to act captured the gunman.

A deeply enlightened person attains Great Fearlessness, and this is different from ordinary or mindless fearlessness. What is mindless fearlessness? A person who is not afraid because he relies on outside protection exhibits this characteristic. Perhaps he is rich and thinks he can buy safety. Maybe he has a gun or is stronger than

other people and thinks that will protect him. It is easy to see that these things are not truly reliable, so this can only be called mindless fearlessness.

I went to Argentina recently, and there is a great deal of violence there. Someone I know who owns a watch store acquired two guns to protect his store. He said they are new models with excellent features! Unfortunately, one day five or

six people went into his store and demanded that he hand over his guns. He thought that the intruders might have been sent by the government, and he asked them how they knew he had guns. They said, "We know." He had no choice but to give them the guns. Before he had the opportunity to use the guns, they were taken away from him. Besides that, he was beaten with the butt of his gun, seriously injured, and robbed. Clearly, his guns did not protect him, even though they had excellent features.



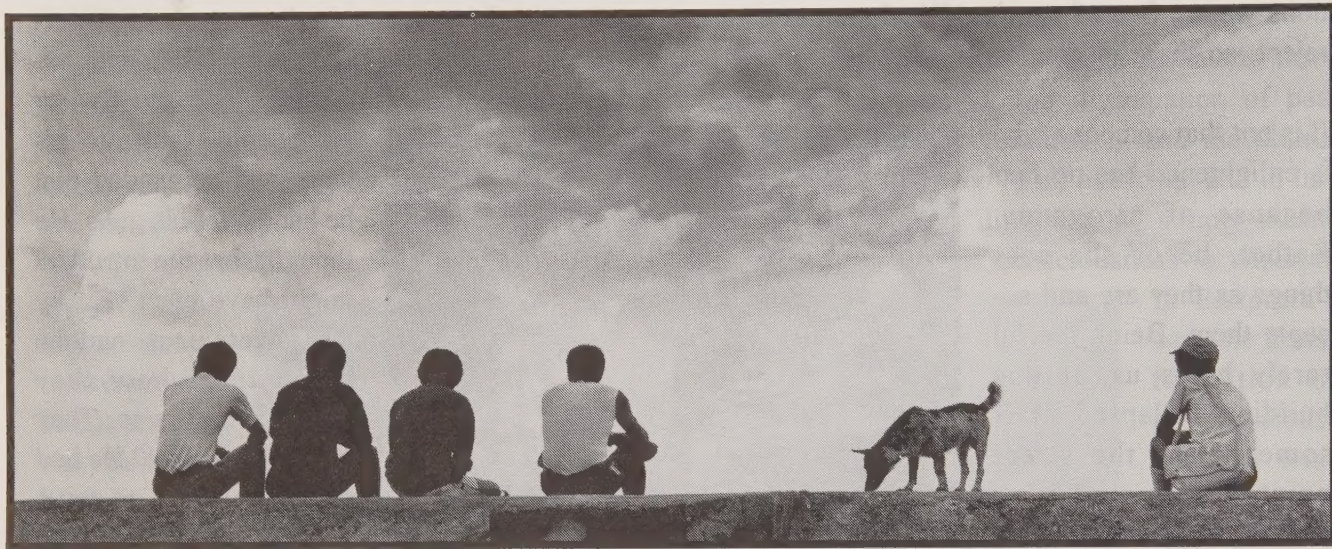
Bernard Handzel

In Paraguay I saw a store filled with guns and other weapons. I didn't realize that they were real; I thought they were toys. I knew someone in the store so I went in and looked around, and came back out and said, "This store has toys which look exactly like real guns!" Then I was told that they were real guns. You may think a store full of weapons might be a safe place to be, but it could be very dangerous.

Great Fearlessness does not rely on strength, on wealth, on knowledge, or on anything else. With

this attitude you can neither lose, nor be defeated. If you do not strive to win, if you neither grasp nor reject, you cannot lose. Relying on nothing, you cannot be defeated. Great Fearlessness may not rely on anything, but you can make use of anything, as wisdom dictates.

opposite side?" And the Buddha said, "I have no view to convince you of. You have great learning, but I have no learning." The scholar became Buddha's disciple. To have no learning, not to rely on anything, is really the greatest learning.



Sentient Beings

Yeachin Tsai

In the time of the Buddha there was a Brahmin scholar who was famous for his great learning. His knowledge was so vast that he feared he might explode. He put iron bands around his head and abdomen to protect them from the pressure of so much learning. The Brahmin heard that Sakyamuni Buddha was also known to be very learned and wise, so he went to Sakyamuni and said, "Let us have a competition." The Buddha said, "Fine." The Brahmin said, "Let whoever loses this competition become the other person's disciple." Sakyamuni said, "Fine," and the scholar said, "Why don't you suggest a proposition for us to debate?" Sakyamuni said, "I have nothing to say." The scholar said, "In that case let me say something." Sakyamuni said, "Fine." The scholar started expounding his ideas, but when he talked about existence Sakyamuni talked about non-existence, and when he talked about non-existence, Sakyamuni talked about existence. Finally the scholar said, "Why do you always take the

Returning to the sutra, Sariputra next said, "...attaining arahatship and qualifying as the Buddha's Elder Son." What does "the Buddha's Elder Son" mean? We know that Sakyamuni Buddha became a buddha through his wisdom. The phrase "attaining bodhi" or "attaining the path." or in this case, "attaining arahatship," means attaining wisdom. To be recognized as the Buddha's Elder Son, Sariputra must have been foremost in wisdom (as the elder son is foremost in birth). The sutras say that the Buddha had one thousand, two hundred and fifty great arahat disciples, but only Sariputra was called the Elder Son. Without wisdom one cannot become a Buddha. Without wisdom one cannot penetrate the Dharma and without wisdom one cannot help sentient beings. The Bodhisattva Manjusri is called the Son of the Dharma King or the Prince of the Dharma. This is similar to Sariputra's name, the Elder Son of the Buddha, and Manjusri is the Bodhisattva of Great Wisdom.

The term “arahat” means “one who deserves offerings” or “he to whom others should make offerings.” An arahat has attained true liberation — anybody who makes offerings to an arahat will accumulate merit. “Arahat” is a Hinayana, or Theravadin, term. Theravadin Buddhists believe that there can be only one Buddha at one time in a particular world system, but people can practice to become arahats. An arahat is completely liberated, as was Sakyamuni Buddha. However, an arahat does not have the same wisdom, merit and virtue as the Buddha, nor does he take the enormous vow to save all sentient beings.

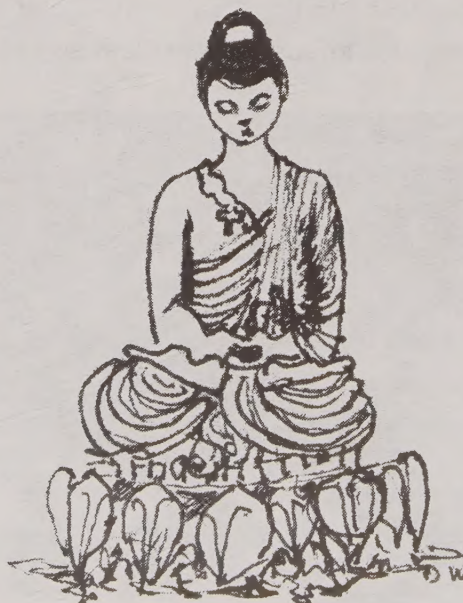
The next two phrases, “born from the Buddha’s mouth” and “by transmission of the Dharma,” are famous phrases from the *Surangama Sutra*. Buddhists often memorize these phrases. They refer to the source of Sariputra’s wisdom. Our bodies are all born from our mothers’ wombs, but the development of wisdom begins with the Dharma, the Buddha’s words. Buddha spoke, and Sariputra heard his words and attained enlightenment. In this sense his wisdom was born from the Buddha’s mouth. “By transmission of the Dharma” follows from “born from the Buddha’s mouth.” If Buddha had not taught the Dharma, Sariputra could not have heard it and attained arahatship.

Even though we are not yet enlightened, are we born from the Buddha’s mouth and by transmission of the Dharma? Yes, even if our wisdom is in an embryonic state, we have heard the Dharma and our wisdom is born from Buddha’s mouth. We should all aspire to develop our wisdom and realize liberation.

Sariputra then said, “As the Buddha now asks about the best means of perfection, according to my personal experience, the best consists in realizing the most illuminating knowledge by means of the mind’s radiant sight-perception.”

There are two phrases at the end of the paragraph which need to be explained further, “the mind’s radiant sight-perception” and “the most illuminating knowledge.” Eye-consciousness, sight-perception, or the eye of the mind, emits light which is called “illumination”, and which is described here as “radiant.” When this illumination is perfect, it is the same as wisdom free from all outflows, which is called “the most illuminating knowledge” here. The eye of the mind generates the light of wisdom. When the light of wisdom is perfected, it is the wisdom of the arahat, and it can be used to help all sentient beings. “...Realizing the most illuminating knowledge by means of the mind’s radiant sight-perception” can also be translated as “...the eye of the mind generates the light of wisdom and with the perfection of that light brings about the understanding of liberation, which is for the benefit of all sentient beings.” Sariputra said that his highest experience was perfect penetration through the medium of eye-consciousness.

This is a difficult section of the *Surangama Sutra*, and not many commentators have tried to make it clear. If I have made any mistakes in my explanation, I can only ask for forgiveness from Sakyamuni Buddha.



News From the Center:

About forty members and friends of the Center attended a Dharma Gathering for English speaking students on Oct. 27. Master Sheng-yen gave a short talk on Buddhist ethics and answered questions from the audience. A social hour followed.

On Oct. 29 Master Sheng-yen spoke on "Revealing the Nature of Mind" to an audience of about 200 at the Center. He discussed the Ch'an understanding of "mind" and "nature," and the process of illuminating the mind and revealing one's self-nature. Master Sheng-yen encouraged the audience to learn to perceive our surroundings according to the enlightened view, so that whether we encounter success or failure we will perceive things just as they are, as entirely new experiences, and as perfect and beautiful.

A "Zen Health Fair" was held on Nov. 4 to raise money to purchase a larger center, since we have outgrown the two buildings we are in now. It was very successful, and we would like to thank Susan Chen for organizing it, as well as Guo-gu Shi, Virginia Tan, Silvia Sun, Judy Chen, Cathy Lu, Judy Chou, Bob Lapides, Cecelia Wu, Amy Yoo, Leslie Wang, David Ng and many others for their help. We'd also like to thank the Rochester Zen Center for donating books, the New York City Department of Sanitation for a presentation on environmental protection, and the Wu Mei Shao Ling Kung-fu Association.

On Nov. 6th and 7th Master Sheng-yen lectured on "Zen and Mental Health" and "Zen and Environmental Protection" at the Taipei Theater in the McGraw-Hill Building on Sixth Ave. in Manhattan. He discussed the need to clear our hearts and purify our minds and mental environment in order to cultivate wisdom and compassion.



*Master Sheng-yen speaks
and Ming-yee Wang translates
at the Taipei Theater*



*An animated audience
at the Taipei Theater*

On the second night Director-Ambassador of the Chinese Cultural Information Center, Tzu-dan Wu, attended and greeted Master Sheng-yen. The event was sponsored by the Institute of Chung-Hwa Buddhist Culture, the Chinese Information and Cultural Center, Dr. Kenneth G. Zysk, Director of the New York University Department of Near Eastern Languages and Literatures and Dr. Grace Fung of the New York Multicultural Resource Center at Hunter College, and organized by Guo-gu Shi and Virginia Tan. We would also like to thank all of the volunteers for their enthusiasm in spreading the Dharma. The Center is planning to organize another public event of this kind in Manhattan next fall.

Master Sheng-yen has been delivering a series of *ti-chang* on Ch'an poems and kung-ans to the Friday Night Ch'an Sitting Group. A *ti-chang* (Jp. *teisho*) is different from a lecture in that it does not approach its subject analytically or conceptually but instead presents a problem intended to prod the student into relating the subject to his or her life, and into realizing the workings of Buddha Nature.

During the Special Wednesday Ch'an Class, Master Sheng-yen continues to comment on Master Tai-hui's (1088-1163) letters of advice to lay practitioners.

On Nov 14 Guo-gu Shi gave a talk on "The Development of the Ch'an Tradition and its Practices" to Professor Evans' class in Buddhism at St. John's University.

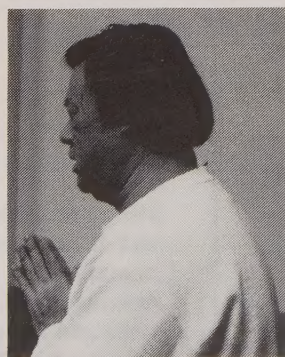
Sunday at the Center:



Meditation



Vegetarian lunch preparation



Chanting

Ongoing Activities, except during retreats:

Recitation Group: Mon. evenings from 7:30 to 9:00 P.M. Amitabha Buddha recitation in Chinese, and prostrations.

Group Meditation: Tues. and Thurs. evenings from 7:30 to 9:00 P.M.

Ch'an Sitting Group: Fri. 7:00 P.M. to 9:00 P.M., with a social half hour until 9:30. An evening of sitting and walking meditation, with a short talk on the application of Ch'an to daily life or the concepts and methods of Ch'an. This is also an opportunity to ask Master Sheng-yen or one of the resident monks for guidance in practice. Please call for details.

Sunday Program: Meditation, chanting, vegetarian lunch, afternoon talk and afternoon meditation. 10:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M.

First Saturday of each month: One day Ch'an retreat, 9:00 A.M. to 8:00 P.M. Please call for details and to register.

Last Saturday of each month: Beginners' Meditation Workshop. In English: 9:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M. In Chinese 2:00 to 6:00. Please call for details and to register.

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